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Report of the Chairmen of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the twenty-fifth series of Joint Meetings of the two Committees

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) held the twenty-fifth series of Joint Meetings at United Nations Headquarters on 25 and 26 October 1990 under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General, Chairman of ACC, and Mr. Andrzej Abraszewski (Poland), Chairman of CPC.

2. Prior to the Joint Meetings, informal meetings were held at the senior working level for a preliminary exchange of views and to discuss the organizational aspects of the Joint Meetings. During the informal meetings check-lists of discussion topics were developed to guide the preparation of the Joint Meetings.

3. At its twenty-ninth session, in 1989, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination recommended topics to be considered in the Joint Meetings during the period 1989-1991. 1/ The topics for 1990 were:

(a) Improvement of co-ordination in the United Nations system;

(b) Natural disaster reduction.

I. OPENING STATEMENTS

A. Statement by the Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

4. The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of ACC, said that as the world underwent fundamental changes, the international community had a unique opportunity to pursue the design for peace called for in the Charter of the United Nations. It was more important than ever for the United Nations system as a whole to address in a concerted way the increasingly complex and interrelated global problems confronting the international community.

5. The co-ordinating role of ACC must take on new significance and, as its Chairman, he was committed to seeing ACC function with increased vitality. In recent years, ACC had been able to marshal the intellectual resources of the system and assist Member States in the formulation of coherent international policies on a large number of major issues, including the international development strategy for the fourth United Nations development decade, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), nutrition, drug abuse control and the environment. He said that the system had clearly proved its capability to deploy its resources quickly and effectively in emergency situations such as the emergency operation in Africa.

6. He stressed that ACC attached great importance to increased transparency regarding the programmes and resources of the United Nations system. In that context, he drew attention to the prototype of the annual overview report of ACC, which showed how more complete information would be provided in 1991.

7. Experience had shown that co-ordination among the organizations of the United Nations system was most effective when the organizations were pursuing goals that were widely supported by the international community and when the requisite resources were available. The problem of resources was extremely serious and had to be addressed without delay.

8. The Secretary-General noted that, in recent years, natural disasters had taken an appalling toll, in terms of both loss of life and material and economic damage. Developing countries often suffered serious long-term consequences. The international community as a whole could, and should, manage its exposure to natural disasters better. The challenge was to ensure that the available knowledge and technological capacity was shared by all countries affected.

9. The Secretary-General stressed that it was necessary to anticipate crises and take preventive measures in a wide variety of fields such as the environment, the movement of populations and the availability of food. It was more essential than ever to acquire a full understanding of the interacting forces that could cause disasters, to develop early warning systems and to take measures to improve preparedness.

10. The Secretary-General noted that the United Nations had embarked upon an International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in 1989. He pointed out that although the action required to achieve the objective of the Decade was fundamentally for countries to take, the international system, as well as non-governmental organizations and the scientific community, had to mobilize and support those efforts. Consequently, he stressed that there was a dual need: to strengthen national capacities and, at the same time, to provide the necessary resources through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms and through the recently established Trust Fund for the Decade.

B. Statement by the Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination

11. The Chairman of CPC said that, in the report on its thirtieth session, CPC had reaffirmed the importance of the Joint Meetings and urged that every effort be made to ensure that the Joint Meetings fulfilled their potential.

12. The objective of the twenty-fifth series of Joint Meetings was to have an open dialogue on the two items on the agenda, with a view to arriving at conclusions that were meaningful and recommendations that were practical and could be implemented.

13. Recalling the first series of Joint Meetings of CPC and ACC, in 1966, at which inter-agency co-ordination was discussed in broad terms, he stressed the importance of having a further opportunity for the Joint Meetings to engage in a frank exchange of views on such a complex and broad subject as co-ordination in the United Nations system.

14. The tremendous expansion and proliferation of programmes and activities in the United Nations system over the past 45 years had made it necessary to avoid overlapping and duplication, to secure complementarity of actions undertaken and to implement agreed programmes jointly. An open exchange of such differing perceptions of co-ordination issues was a healthy process and a sine qua non for a common understanding to be reached.

15. The question of resources was a concern of both Member States and secretariats, because resource constraints had made co-ordination more difficult. It was stressed that the call for additional resources would not be answered until Member States, particularly the major contributors, were truly convinced that the United Nations system was using the available resources efficiently.

16. He said that a number of new measures were contemplated to improve information-sharing and transparency. They included an improved version of the annual overview report of ACC, which contained an addendum providing information on programmes and resources of the United Nations system. A substantial effort would be required to facilitate access to data and information. Access to specific, complete and comparable information would increase the confidence of Member States in the ability of international organizations to deliver programmes efficiently and thus make them more willing to direct additional resources to the system.

17. He observed that the perceptible improvement in the international climate could enhance the "culture of co-ordination".

18. On the question of natural disaster reduction, he said that the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was an example of how a mechanism to oversee and co-ordinate the programmes and activities of the United Nations system could be created and made operational. Speedy and satisfactory solutions of start-up problems of co-ordination in the sector of natural disaster reduction would be important for the growth of the Trust Fund for the Decade. Over the years, most of the organizations of the system had had programmes relating to natural disasters. Therefore the goal was to bring together all the efforts of the United Nations system and make them a coherent whole, mutually supportive and complementary.

II. SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

Improvement of co-ordination in the United Nations system

19. The Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, in introducing the background paper on improvement of co-ordination, said that the purpose of the paper was to provoke frank discussion. He noted that neither Member States nor members of ACC were fully satisfied with present co-ordination efforts. One of the reasons lay in the difference of perceptions of co-ordination. A common understanding of co-ordination was therefore essential for enhancing its effectiveness.

20. He stressed the need to strengthen the Economic and Social Council to enable it to fully discharge its responsibilities under the Charter to co-ordinate the

activities of the United Nations system through monitoring programme delivery and identifying priority areas for effective system-wide efforts. He emphasized the importance of co-ordination at the country level; in particular, of a tripartite relationship linking the efforts of the United Nations system with those of bilateral donors and national Governments. Better use should be made of the medium-term plan as a co-ordination instrument. He suggested that system-wide action plans containing a clear indication of the resources required, such as the one on drug abuse control, could serve as a useful framework for system-wide co-ordination. In conclusion, he said that there were tangible and feasible steps which could be taken to improve co-ordination within the United Nations system.

21. In discussing the question, many speakers expressed their appreciation of the paper on co-ordination, noting that its frank and candid style was refreshing and would stimulate a frank and candid discussion.

22. In reviewing the machinery for co-ordination, members of both Committees noted the adequacy of existing intergovernmental and intersecretariat bodies charged with co-ordination and emphasized that efforts should be made to improve their effectiveness. Particular attention was given to the central role of the Economic and Social Council. One member suggested that there be a single regular session of the Council, at which both social and economic issues could be discussed in an integrated manner. Another suggested that the agenda of the bodies dealing with social and economic issues be carefully scrutinized and streamlined as there was excessive duplication.

23. Recognizing the importance of the ACC machinery for system-wide co-ordination, some members suggested that the Secretary-General review secretariat support for ACC, taking into account the work-load involved in the preparation of the improved annual overview report of ACC, among other tasks.

24. A number of participants highlighted the need for central authority and leadership for co-ordination at the intergovernmental level. Many members of both Committees emphasized the important role of the Secretary-General in providing overall leadership. Several suggested that the role and authority of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation be enhanced. One CPC member suggested that there be an associate secretary-general for administration and co-ordination matters, appointed by the Secretary-General and confirmed by the General Assembly. It was suggested that a high-level official in each agency be designated as a focal point for co-ordination.

25. Other members said that, in view of the diversity of the activities undertaken by the United Nations, a more flexible approach to co-ordination should be sought. The nature of the programme should dictate the co-ordination mechanism and some suggested that the concept of "lead agency" be used more vigorously for specific themes.

26. A number of ACC members provided concrete examples of the effectiveness of co-ordination in specific areas: the system's co-operation on AIDS, climate change, nutrition and emergency operations in Africa and the recent World Summit for Children.

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27. With regard to the Joint Meetings, one member suggested that they take place twice a year for the next three years on pilot issues in order to enhance continuity of the dialogue. Consideration could then be given to reverting to the annual meeting if that was found more effective. Another member recommended that there be no prepared statements at those meetings, but rather a focus on frank dialogue.

28. Members of CPC called for greater co-ordination among agencies. While appreciating that that was not always easy, especially in view of limited resources, they urged the executive heads of agencies to take the matter more seriously and avoid competitiveness.

29. In response to the view expressed by many members of ACC that co-ordination was costly, some CPC members emphasized that co-ordination should result in resources being used more effectively, thereby releasing resources for other substantive activities. Some others pointed out that improved co-ordination would increase the confidence of Member States in the United Nations system and make them more willing to provide additional resources to organizations of the system.

30. Members took note of and welcomed the prototype of the annual overview report of ACC. Some members stressed that the report should be analytical and forward-looking. In that regard, it was proposed that the foreword of the Secretary-General highlight major developments of the preceding year and suggest international problem areas needing the attention of the United Nations system as a whole. Other members proposed that the report be widely distributed to all intergovernmental bodies concerned to facilitate co-ordination among various ministries within Governments and to strengthen the co-ordination efforts of the system.

31. Medium-term plans and programme budgets were identified as useful tools to promote co-ordination. More substantive prior consultations in the preparation of those documents and more consistency in their format would contribute to enhanced co-ordination. Some members suggested that the introduction to the medium-term plan of the United Nations take into account the views of Member States, particularly in identifying priorities. Thematic analyses and system-wide medium-term plans were also seen as useful instruments.

32. Co-ordination at the field level was viewed as increasingly important, as was the role of the United Nations in assisting Governments to co-ordinate their own national machineries more effectively. In that regard, the need for the role of the resident co-ordinator to be enhanced was highlighted, as was the need for better co-operation with the regional commissions.

33. A number of members mentioned the issue of the financial viability of the organizations of the United Nations system and emphasized the need for all Member States to fulfil their obligation under the Charter to pay their assessed contributions.

34. There was general agreement among the members of both Committees about ways and means of improving co-ordination within the United Nations system. Their conclusions and recommendations are contained in paragraphs 42-57 below.

Natural disaster reduction

35. There was general agreement among the members of both Committees about ways and means of promoting international efforts to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and to effectively support the goals and objectives of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. It was further emphasized that issues related to the human and economic impact of disasters should be fully integrated in the development process.

36. While welcoming the establishment of the secretariat for the Decade, a number of members expressed regret that there had been a delay in its establishment and urged that special efforts be undertaken to overcome such delays. One member suggested that further thought be given to the reporting procedures for the activities related to the Decade. Another member expressed regret that the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction had not been observed and urged that that not happen again.

37. A number of CPC members stressed that donor countries should be kept fully informed of the financial requirements for the Decade. They said that because the resources for the Decade were extrabudgetary there was a great need for accountability. Some members said that contributions to the Trust Fund for the Decade depended on the progress made in the implementation of Decade activities and stressed the need for enhanced co-ordination with the organizations concerned, such as the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO). It was suggested that the Decade secretariat remain small in size and be financed exclusively from extrabudgetary sources. Other members, however, expressed the view that the possibility of securing some regular budget funds and seconding staff to the secretariat from the agencies concerned should be examined. It was stressed that the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, as Chairman of the United Nations system Steering Committee for the Decade, should play an important co-ordination role.

38. Many members noted with satisfaction the establishment of national committees for the Decade in more than 60 countries. A number of them suggested that the United Nations support and encourage the efforts of those committees. In the least developed countries, financial support for such committees should be provided by the United Nations, as should advice to enhance national strategies. Several members suggested that the links between environmental issues and natural disasters be highlighted. Several other members pointed out that it was not only the United Nations system that was involved in activities for the Decade but also many non-governmental organizations and the scientific community as well. These organizations should also be encouraged and, to the maximum extent possible, their efforts should be co-ordinated with those of the United Nations system.

39. One member said that a careful study should be carried out by the United Nations regarding the provision of disaster relief materials. Too often materials provided by different agencies overlapped and were not appropriate for natural disaster reduction and environment issues.

40. A number of members of ACC identified specific proposals and projects they were planning to implement in co-operation with concerned Governments and national committees. Members of CPC welcomed those initiatives and expressed the opinion that more specific proposals for bilateral and multilateral funding should be made and that such proposals should focus, inter alia, on the disaster prevention needs of developing countries.

41. The conclusions and recommendations agreed to by the Joint Meetings concerning natural disaster reduction are contained in paragraphs 58-66 below.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Improvement of co-ordination in the United Nations system

42. The new political climate provides the international community with a challenge to pursue more vigorously the design for peace called for in the Charter of the United Nations. This would require more effective co-ordination and co-operation within the United Nations system to promote conditions of stability and economic and social progress, which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among countries.

43. The Joint Meetings reaffirmed the importance of co-ordination as an instrument for enhancing complementarity, for avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts and for promoting efficient use of the human and financial resources of the organizations of the United Nations system. Although it was appreciated that co-ordination had to be cost-effective, it was recognized that co-ordination involved cost and therefore efforts had to concentrate on areas with the maximum benefit for Member States.

44. It was recognized that, given the decentralized nature of the United Nations system and the multisectoral nature of development issues and other global problems requiring co-ordination, the need for co-ordination was imperative. The Joint Meetings recalled that the relationship agreements concluded between the United Nations and the United Nations specialized agencies in accordance with Article 57 of the Charter provided a basic framework of co-operation within the United Nations system.

45. The need for a common understanding of co-ordination was stressed. Co-ordination would be facilitated by clear goals and common objectives. It was recognized that both Member States and secretariats of United Nations organizations had shared responsibilities with respect to co-ordination. It was emphasized that organizations of the system should pursue collectively and individually the common goals and objectives of the system.

46. The Joint Meetings noted that co-ordination was carried out on a continuous basis through informal as well as formal mechanisms. The Joint Meetings recognized that existing intergovernmental and intersecretariat bodies charged with co-ordination were adequate. However, efforts had to be made to enhance their effectiveness.

47. ACC, under the leadership of the Secretary-General and strengthened in accordance with General Assembly resolution 44/200 A, should play a more active role in mobilizing the collective capacities of the system to address, in a coherent and integrated manner, development issues as well as global problems which required co-ordination.

48. At the intergovernmental level, the General Assembly has the overall responsibility for co-ordination, including administrative and budgetary co-ordination within the United Nations system.

49. In the Charter, the Economic and Social Council has been assigned clear responsibilities, under the authority of the General Assembly, for co-ordination in the economic and social fields. It is essential that the political will be found to revitalize the Council so that it can carry out the functions assigned to it. The importance of CPC in assisting the Council in carrying out its co-ordination role was highlighted.

50. With regard to instruments for co-ordination, it was emphasized that better use should be made of existing mechanisms. The reports on co-ordination prepared by the Secretariat for consideration by intergovernmental bodies should in future describe in a frank and clear manner actual difficulties related to co-ordination. Co-ordination instruments that stipulated not only the tasks to be carried out but also the resources required and available for those purposes were considered most useful.

51. It was also emphasized that enhanced administrative and budgetary co-ordination would be indispensable for the optimal utilization of resources at the system level. The mandate conferred on the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions by the General Assembly with regard to the administrative budgets of the organizations and programmes that are members of the system was recalled.

52. The Joint Meetings stressed the importance of effective co-ordination at the country level. It was noted that within the United Nations system there had recently been considerable progress in co-ordination at the country level. Organizations of the system needed to intensify their efforts to develop a genuine team approach at the country level in support of national plans and priorities.

53. The Joint Meetings emphasized that, in accordance with budgetary practices, Member States should provide sufficient resources in a timely manner to various organizations of the United Nations system in order to ensure effective co-ordination in the implementation of mandated programmes and activities in various fields.

54. The annual overview report of ACC was a useful mechanism for informing Member States about the system-wide activities of organizations of the system. Efforts should be made to continue to improve the report by making it more analytical and forward-looking. The prototype of the report, which had been submitted to the Joint Meetings, was considered a good basis upon which to prepare the annual overview report of ACC for 1990, taking into account comments made during the Joint

Meetings. In the report, ACC should also highlight problems of co-ordination requiring urgent attention and action by Governments as well as proposals on courses of action to be taken, agencies responsible and resources needed.

55. The Joint Meetings noted the need for the Secretary-General, as Chairman of ACC, to review secretariat support for ACC in order to provide the kind of overview report requested by the Joint Meetings.

56. Timely, comprehensive and comparable information on the programmes and resources of organizations of the United Nations system would constitute an extremely important tool to enhance co-ordination. This information would make it easier for Governments to ensure coherence and consistency in their positions as expressed in various intergovernmental bodies. It would also enable organizations of the system to improve their programme planning because it would be easier for them to take each other's activities into account.

57. System-wide communication and information should be strengthened. To this end, an improved and updated common classification of terminology should be developed. The suggestions of ACC on the manner in which information and programmes would be presented in future annual overview reports were accepted. It was agreed that information on both regular as well as extrabudgetary resources would be included. The desirability of developing a system-wide data base containing information on programmes and resources was stressed, and ACC was requested to examine the matter further.

B. Natural disaster reduction

58. The Joint Meetings recognized that the human and economic impact of disasters was not yet sufficiently taken into account in economic and social decision-making or in the development process. Greater efforts should be made to address disaster prevention and mitigation as part of the development process because the human and material impact of disasters, particularly in developing countries, was high.

59. The United Nations system should give higher priority to the integration of disaster prevention and/or mitigation in its existing programmes of development activities.

60. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction is addressed to the international community as a whole. It envisages efforts at various levels, national and international, by a large number of actors. The United Nations system is required to play a catalytic and supporting role. There is already extensive co-operation between the organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system concerned. However, the paper before the Joint Meetings did not provide sufficient detailed information on the co-ordination taking place within the framework of the Decade. In particular, the Joint Meetings wished to ensure that the maximum advantage was taken of existing substantive capacities, especially those of UNDRO. The close association envisaged in General Assembly resolution 44/236 between the UNDRO and Decade secretariats was of key importance and should be vigorously pursued. The Meetings stressed the important role of the

Director-General as the focal point for overseeing and co-ordinating the programmes and activities of the United Nations system during the Decade, and as Chairman of the United Nations system Steering Committee.

61. The Joint Meetings agreed that the collective capacity of the United Nations to provide early warning and/or identification of emerging trends or hazardous phenomena that could lead to natural disasters could be enhanced. Critical intersectoral linkages should be identified. The Joint Meetings agreed that a reliable data base on natural disasters could be an important tool for decision-making.

62. The Joint Meetings agreed that the capacity of the international community in the area of disaster prevention and mitigation would be enhanced by promoting technical and technological capacities and training programmes as well as a greater flow of information.

63. The Joint Meetings emphasized the need to intensify efforts for the implementation of the goals and objectives of the Decade. In that regard, the important roles of the high-level council, the scientific and technical committee and the Decade secretariat were stressed. Efforts should be made to establish without further delay all the mechanisms envisaged in General Assembly resolution 44/236.

64. All countries, especially those prone to disasters, should devise national strategies to prevent and mitigate disasters and the United Nations system should assist within its capacities. The establishment and effective functioning of national committees, or other appropriate co-ordinating mechanisms, as called for in General Assembly resolution 44/236, are critical factors for the successful implementation of national strategies. Such committees should draw upon all appropriate sections of the society concerned, receive necessary technical and financial support and benefit from the knowledge and experience available in the United Nations system. Exchange of information between national committees should be fostered.

65. A framework programme for the Decade should be developed by the scientific and technical committee with the full support of the Decade secretariat. Activities within this programme should take into account and build on activities of existing related programmes, in close co-operation and co-ordination with all the organizations and programmes of the United Nations system. Particular attention should be given to priority areas determined by Governments of Member States.

66. The Joint Meetings recalled that, in resolution 44/236, the General Assembly had recommended that extrabudgetary resources be provided for the implementation of the activities of the Decade. Governments, international organizations and other sources, including the private sector, are urged to make voluntary contributions to this end. It is important that the Secretary-General take all measures to ensure the necessary voluntary financial support for this purpose.

Notes

1/ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/44/16), para. 365.